

support the restoration project.¹⁴ By the end of the month the fledgling organization had launched a fundraising drive and printed a solicitation brochure complete with a conjectural drawing of a restored Ramsay House. [Illustration #3] The effort had an ambitious, if somewhat naive, plan in which every citizen in the City would contribute and that the drive to raise the \$20,000 estimated restoration costs could be concluded within a two-week period. As the brochure noted "We know your civic pride is such that you will be eager to help financially in this project."¹⁵ Many proved not to be so eager and this initial effort was doomed to failure.

City Council concluded that the group's campaign was a bit too optimistic and directed them to incorporate as a non-profit organization. At the same time, as a means of hedging their bets, City Council appointed its own committee to monitor the progress of the group's efforts. Named to the City Council committee were City Councilman Everett Hellmuth, City Manager Carl L. Budwesky and City Attorney Joseph M. Pancoast.¹⁶

It was not until the middle of July that the Ramsay House group got around to developing a formal proposal for incorporation. The plan that was presented was somewhat more ambitious and farsighted than merely the restoration of the building. It called for the formation of an Alexandria Historical Society which would have as its first and central goal the restoration of the building, but would also act as a primary advocate for protection of landmarks in Alexandria and a "central clearing house" for all the public landmarks in the city. The proposal envisioned hiring an architect "experienced in the restoration of Colonial structures of this area of the country." The proposal was somewhat more vague on the use of Ramsay House itself. In general terms it was proposed that two rooms in the building be set aside for the display of "historic relics" while the other rooms and basement could be used for "club meetings, social functions and other gatherings."

¹⁴ "Committee to Map", *ibid.*; "Sullivan Heads Civic Group Formed for Ramsay Campaign", AG, 5/12/1944, p.1; and, "Mrs. Taliaferro Donates \$500 to Ramsay Restoration Fund", AG, 5/17/1944, p.1. Mrs. Taliaferro was the widow of the Governor of Wyoming and vice-regent of the Mount Vernon Ladies Association from Wyoming. "Restoration of Ramsay House Gains Support of DAR Chapter", AG, 5/17/1944, p.3.

¹⁵ "Ramsay Campaign Launched", AG, 5/29/1944, p.1; the fundraising brochure is in the Alexandria Library Special Collections, Box 240.

¹⁶ "Ramsay Group Takes Action to Incorporate", AG, 6/2/1944, p.1; "City, Ramsay Officials to Meet Tuesday for Final Decisions", AG, 6/14/1944, p.1; and, "Wilkins Names Hellmuth to Ramsay Group", AG, 6/27/1944, p.1.

The plan had the endorsement of the City Council appointed committee.¹⁷

Months passed and nothing tangible happened to the house. By the middle of December the *Gazette*, which had been the early cheerleader for the preservation of the building, could not contain itself any longer and published an editorial which chided the organization for not doing anything and warned that the coming winter months could mean disaster for the building which was open to the elements. The editorial apparently had the desired effect because shortly thereafter Councilman Hellmuth introduced a resolution which called for the city to undertake the work before weather completed the demolition process. The Ramsay House Committee, however, said that they had not done anything precisely because they were waiting for some action from City Council. At the same time, they acknowledged that they had not raised the necessary funds to undertake the restoration work. A compromise was reached, and Council agreed that the Historical Society would be "exclusively" responsible for the restoration while the City would maintain title to the building.¹⁸

Again, no work was done on the building. Months passed and the Ramsay House group had still not incorporated and apparently indicated to City Council that they would not do so until the details of a lease of the building from the city to the organization were completed. Finally in November 1945, eighteen months after the city had originally purchased the building, the Ramsay House group was ready to present its restoration plans to City Council. In noting the "snail-like pace of progression", the *Gazette* quoted the defensive Sullivan as saying "a job done slowly but well is more desirable than one done quickly and poorly." By the end of 1945 the Ramsay House group and the City had agreed to the terms of a lease which called for the group to restore the building with the proviso that a portion of the building would be for public use.¹⁹

By this time the Ramsay group needed the expert advice of a restoration architect and approached a number of Alexandria architects about their ideas for the restoration, cost estimates and fee schedule. They selected Milton Grigg, an Alexandria native who had been part of the original Colonial Williamsburg

¹⁷ "Ramsay House Plan Ready", *AG*, 7/17/1944, p.1.; The Alexandria Historical Society organized in 1944 should not be confused with the present Historical Society which was founded in 1975.

¹⁸ "Unfinished Business", editorial, *AG*, 12/14/1944, p.4; "Council Weighs Plan to Repair Historic Home", 2/13/1945, p.1; and, "Committee to Restore Landmark", 2/14/1945, p.1.

¹⁹ "To Discuss Ramsey [sic.] House Restoration", *AG*, 4/27/1945, p.1; "Ramsay House Restoration Hangs Fire", *AG*, 6/12/1945, p.1; "Ramsay House to Get Hearing Again, Nov. 2", *AG*, 10/22/1945, p.1; "Ramsay House Restoration Plans Complete", *AG*, 11/10/1945, p.1; and, "Ramsay House Group Told to Incorporate", *AG*, 12/2/1945, p.1

architectural staff in the late 1920s and early 1930s and, who had an active practice in the restoration of historic buildings in Virginia.²⁰ Thomas Tileston Waterman was disappointed that he had not been selected and wrote to Clyde Lamond, the group's vice-president that his experience in the restoration work at Gadsby's Tavern and the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Shop provided an excellent background with which to undertake the work at the Ramsay House.²¹

By mid-1946 the City Council gave up on the Ramsay House group and opted to use the building for additional city government offices and voted to house the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court in the structure. Council members expected opposition from the historical society and they were not wrong. The newspaper described the group as "incensed" over the City proposal. The group noted that their efforts to "restore" the building were severely hampered by the fact that building materials were in very short supply after the end of World War II. The group insisted that the building should be an "historic shrine" and not be put to use as an office annex to City Hall. Faced with vigorous lobbying by the Society, Council backed down from its intent to move court offices into the building less than two weeks after they had first proposed the change in use. The Council resolution authorizing the continuing restoration efforts was made by First Ward Councilman Thomas A. Hulfish, Jr. Councilman Hellmuth added a provision giving the Society an additional two and a half years to complete its work.²²

Even if the Council proposal had been a canard, it did serve to light a fire under the Society, and they began a more public role with their plans for the restoration of the building. Within six weeks of the Council threat, Grigg had produced a perspective drawing of a "restored" Ramsay House that was used in

²⁰ Milton Grigg (1905-1982) received his architecture degree from the University of Virginia in 1929 and immediately began work at Colonial Williamsburg. He went into private practice in 1933 and, in the mid-1930s, was the restoration architect for Gadsby's Tavern. Later he was the restoration architect for Monticello. Grigg was nationally known as an ecclesiastical architect and designed a hundred or more churches nationwide. In the historic district of Alexandria he was responsible for the design of the Parish Halls for both Christ Church on North Washington Street (1950) and St. Paul's Episcopal Church on South Pitt Street (1947). See, "The Making of a Profession, Ten Who Made a Difference", *Inform*, v.5, no.3, pp. 24-25. Grigg entry by Roulhac Toledano. "Under his leadership, restoration of historic buildings was made a respectable endeavor for architects."

²¹ "Society Will Apply for Charter", *AG*, 12/2/1945, p.1; Waterman to Clyde Lamond, October 31, 1945, Alexandria Library Special Collections, vertical files.

²² "Juvenile Court Will Use Old Ramsay Structure", *AG*, 4/17/1946, p.1; "Ramsay Society Incensed", *AG*, 4/18/1946, p.1; "Society to Fight Ramsay Site Use", *AG*, 4/17/1946, p.1; "City Abandons Plans to Use Ramsay House", *AG*, 4/26/1946, p.1.

fundraising efforts.²³

Over the course of the next six months, through the summer and fall of 1946, Grigg proceeded with his restoration investigation and research of Ramsay House. By the spring of 1947 the Society had mapped out and had implemented a serious fundraising effort. As a first step the organization changed leadership and Councilman Hellmuth was elected president. As the campaign began significant gifts were made to the Society by the Alexandria Association; prestigious endorsements of the project were secured from the Governor, both United States Senators, the local Congressman and the Mayor; a membership drive headed by



Illustration #4--Ramsay House in late 1947 before reconstruction efforts began. The sign on the house includes Milton L. Grigg's presentation rendering of a restored Ramsay House. Courtesy: Maurice Crabill

²³ "Ramsay House Committee Meets June 7", AG, 5/18/1946, p.1; "Need \$25,000 to Restore Ramsay House", AG, 6/8/1946, p.1; "Restoration Drawing", AG, 6/10/1946, p.1.

Rebecca Ramsay Reese was launched; and, a large poster type sign was put up on Ramsay House portraying the restored building.²⁴ [Illustration #4]

Over the course of the next eighteen months the Society continued to actively raise the funds for the restoration project. Fundraising efforts included a benefit card party and fashion show at Gadsby's Tavern sponsored by the Colonial Dames; a program to physically tag [i.e. touch] members of the public by Alexandria Association volunteers and the proceeds from the 1949 Alexandria Association's annual tour of historic homes.²⁵

One of the problems in attracting significant public interest in the restoration of Ramsay House was the general unsavory reputation of the lower blocks of King Street which, in the early 1950s, were viewed as being in a severely deteriorated and blighted condition and where "the largest concentration of undesirable persons were found in the shadow of city hall and police headquarters."²⁶ Given this perception it is little wonder that many could not see the efficacy of restoring the building.

Despite the optimistic hopes of the Society, the fundraising was spotty and fitful and did not result in anything close to the \$25,000 goal. The hopes of restoring the building for Alexandria's bicentennial celebrations in the summer of 1949 were dashed. By the fall of 1949, there still had been no physical work done on the building. Once again the *Gazette* called into question the ability of the Historical Society to raise the necessary funds and expressed its concern about the deteriorating condition of the building and noted somewhat sarcastically: "Alexandria, unlike Williamsburg, has no Rockeller Foundation to restore it to its Colonial grandeur. Time and nature being what they are, the city may soon have

²⁴ "Hellmuth Elected President of Local Historical Society", *AG*, 2/28/1947, p.1; Historical Society New Heads Named", *AG*, 3/15/1947, p.3; "Historical Society Donates \$500 to Ramsay House Fund", *AG*, 4/19/1947, p.1, 3; "Ramsay House Restoration Sponsors Named; Full Month Set Aside for Fund Drive", *AG*, 4/30/1947, p.1.

²⁵ "Colonial Dames Plan Benefit Style Show for Wednesday", *AG*, 6/8/1948, p.2; "Tag Day Slated to Raise Funds for Ramsay House Restoration", *AG*, 10/15/1948, p.2; "2 Day Homes Tour Slated for May 7-8", *AG*, 3/14/1949, p.1; Ann Pettit, "Society: Washington and Alexandria Residents Tour Historic Homes and Gardens of Alexandria", *AG*, 5/9/1949, p.4.

²⁶ "Vagranti Problem Study is Approved", *AG*, 8/23/1950, p.1; "Readers Write", *AG*, 8/26/1950, p.2; "Readers Write", *AG*, 8/29/1950, p.6.